

FREE WILL



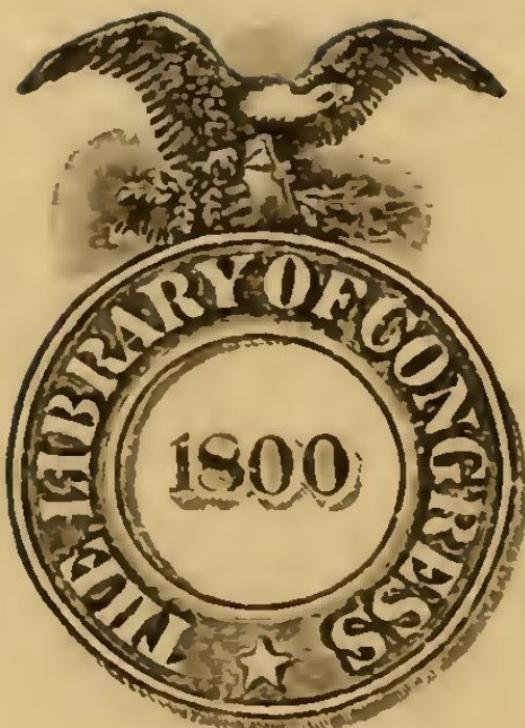
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Free Will,
THE GREATEST OF THE
SEVEN WORLD-RIDDLES
THREE LECTURES
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CONTENTS

LECTURE 1: THE PROBLEM
STATED

LECTURE 2: THE
EXPERIMENTAL
EVIDENCE OF FREE WILL

LECTURE 3: FREE WILL,
THE INDISPENSABLE
BASIS OF MORALITY AND
THE NECESSARY
COMPLEMENT OF MAN'S
RATIONAL NATURE

FREE WILL, THE
GREATEST OF THE SEVEN
WORLD-RIDDLES

Lecture 1: The Problem Stated.

IN the famous address delivered on the 8th of July, 1880, before the Berlin Academy of Sciences, the avowed Materialist and Evolutionist Du Bois-Reymond singled out seven problems, for which, he said, Science has no answer, and which will forever remain insoluble riddles:

“Ignoramus et ignorabimus !”

The problems are: (1) the nature of matter and force, (2) the origin of motion, (3) the origin of life, (4) the apparently designed order of nature, (5) the origin of

before us. Then you may judge for yourselves whether I am right in stating that Scholastic Philosophy, though deductive, not only does not discard empirical inquiry, but that experimental knowledge is its very backbone.

Various Meanings of the Term: Freedom.

To proceed logically, then, let us first define the terms involved in the issue and next determine the state of the question. This is typical of the Scholastic Method, and would that this feature had been retained by modern philosophical writers.

absolutely independent, having no superior, and who is, moreover, the fount of all lawful authority. But in the wider and more common sense of the term, we all enjoy this freedom to a certain extent, for with regard to such actions as are neither commanded nor forbidden by human or divine law, we are free and independent.

Freedom of Choice.

Freedom of Choice is freedom in the strictest sense of the term, and is, as stated, the proper subject of the present discussion. It not only involves the immunity of an

present motives. We shall return to this point when we come to speak of the conditions indispensable for actual freedom or free choice.

The Time-honored Definition of Freedom of Choice.

We are now ready for a strict definition of freedom of choice. The Schoolmen defined it

must be fulfilled. What then are the conditions for free choice?

Conditions for Free Choice.

The first condition for free choice is the state of *consciousness and attention*. There are of course degrees of consciousness and attention; hence there are also degrees of free choice. But if consciousness and attention are entirely wanting, as for instance in sleep, there can be no question of free choice. When we are half asleep or in a state of drowsiness, consciousness and attention are almost entirely wanting,

deliberation, i. e., weighing the motives intellectually apprehended. Every free volition must be preceded by a judgment on the comparative goodness of the various objects of choice. In the language of the Schoolmen this condition was expressed by the statement, that a free volition must be preceded by *an objectively indifferent judgment*.

An Objectively Indifferent Judgment.

Though such terminology, unfamiliar as it is, may seem odd to readers of modern philosophical works, still it is

hence its indifference is called *Active*.

Active Indifference Versus the Parallelogram of Forces.

Let us pause here for a moment to consider, how diametrically opposed this power of self-determination is to the laws of Mechanics which govern the activity of material things. A simple illustration will make this clear. When a body is pulled in one direction with a force of 5 pounds, and in another with a force of 3 pounds, you can determine beforehand by the parallelogram of forces in which direction it will go. If

and conceive the body, thus acted upon, to take its own attitude and determine its own direction of motion. We wonder no longer, that Du Bois-Reymond was in sheer despair over the problem how to fit the stubborn fact of free will into Mechanics.

Cutting the Gordian Knot.

A simple solution of the conundrum was suggested by Haeckel, who is less particular about facts. The fanatic of Monism resorted to the same expedient which he made use of when facts did not bear out his pet theory of his monkey ancestry. In the

Raising a Cloud of Metaphysical Dust.

When reading the introduction to the article on Free Will in the *Encyclopedia Americana*, I am forcibly reminded of a passage in Cicero's speech in defense of Milo. In that part of the speech which is known as *Narratio*, he is to state the facts of the case, which was in plain and simple language: Milo and his servants waylaid Clodius and killed him. Now Cicero was most assuredly a master of elegant periods, which though elaborate are always clear and transparent.

but invariably its predecessor: we do not will and act simultaneously, but in succession."

This is what I call raising metaphysical dust to obscure a simple question of fact. In due time we shall return to this passage and analyze a few of its statements; for the present its very bewildering confusion serves only to illustrate another mode of attack on free will.

The Question.

After this somewhat distracting digression let us formulate the question to be answered. Here it is: Is man's

Lecture 2: The Experimental Evidence of Free Will

IN order to substantiate our position with regard to Free Will we adduce three lines of argument, which may be aptly called the experimental, the moral and the teleological. Before proceeding, however, I wish to illustrate the difference of procedure in these three arguments.

Three Methods of Proof.

In proving the existence of anything I may adopt three methods of proof. I may be able to bring the object,

the proofs in detail. In this lecture, however, we shall restrict ourselves to the experimental evidence for free will.

The Testimony of Consciousness.

I realize by the unmistakable testimony of consciousness, that very often it is in the power of my will to choose among various actions which I have motives to perform. Let us substantiate this statement first by an example of an action, to the performance of which we attach little importance.

After having given, for

of our future actions is not only compatible with freedom, but is meaningless except in the supposition that we are free and are conscious of it at the time of such prediction.

Reproach and Remorse.

We reproach ourselves for certain actions of the past. In considering this fact we seem to come near the moral argument; still we are not arguing as yet from ethical notions, but we insist here on our *perception* of freedom and are still considering the direct experimental evidence for freedom. It is, then, an

sentiments are as far apart as the poles. Where lies the difference? In the perception of freedom. The parricide knows that his act was free, and this is the worm that dieth not.

No Fact More Evident — No Fact More Frequently Expressed.

There is no fact more evident to us than that of personal freedom. We distinguish most clearly between actions of ours which are beyond our control and those which are subject to our free choice. No one ever dreamt of claiming control

Men will jeopardize all their earthly possessions, even life and limb, in defense of personal freedom. All glory in the fact, that “man is free, though born in chains,” as Schiller has it.

Answers of Materialists to the First Argument.

Now what do determinists, and in particular materialists, say to this argument? Some of them, untrue to the first principle of the positive and exact sciences, enter into metaphysical speculations concerning the possibility of freedom. They are guilty of that very charge which they so

outer senses! Let me adapt the metaphysical speculations by which the writer on free will in the *Encyclopedia Americana* tries to obscure the direct experimental evidence of freedom, to the question, whether or not such entities as dogs exist.

An Adaptation in Parody of a Profound Metaphysical Speculation.

“The question of the existence of dogs is properly divided into two sections, that of the metaphysical basis and that of the doctrinal application, how namely in practical life we are to

The Tail Wagging the Dog.

That is what the Greeks called a “*hysteron proteron*” and what we would call the tail wagging the dog. For from the mere *fact* that something really exists, we know that it is possible, and it is preposterous in face of the evident fact to argue to its non-existence from the impossibility of squaring this fact with our preconceived notions concerning the nature of things.

But the assertion that the perception of freedom is an illusion, is too serious to allow it to pass with a joke. We must look a little more closely

deliberate and indeliberate acts. In face of such clear testimony it is positively absurd to question whether or not we interpret rightly the contents of such testimony.

Mistaking Logical Possibility for Power of Free Choice.

Professor Alexander (quoted by Fr. Maher, S. J., *Psychology*, p. 413) explains to us in detail how we come to make such a false interpretation. “Which motive is chosen,” he says, “is perfectly fixed and dependent upon the character, which cannot choose otherwise than it does.” But whilst we are

choice.

The Sensation of a Man Pulled in Two Directions.

Still more unsuccessful is Professor Alexander, when he offers the following explanation of our consciousness of freedom. He says: "Pull a body to the right with a force of twelve pounds, and to the left with a force of eight; it moves to the right. Imagine that body a mind aware of the forces which act upon it; it will move in the direction of that which, for whatever reason, appeals to it most; and in doing so it will, *just because it is conscious,*

experience in the matter, but I venture to predict that, when the pulling begins, the subject of the experiment will have the very uncomfortable sensation of being pulled, and that by no degree of conscious attention to the forces pulling him will he conjure up the feeling of moving freely.

O tempora, O mores! To what lengths of absurdity men will go, in order to explain away an inconvenient fact!

The Evidence of Consciousness Too Crude.

The attitude which the late Professor James of Harvard

had," as the evidence of introspection is *too crude*.

Going Back to a Chapter of Critical Logic.

Why is the evidence of introspection too crude? It is absolutely the only means we have to acquire the knowledge of present internal facts. Of course, if *too much* is expected from this evidence, it is most assuredly *too crude*; and that is true not only of the evidence of introspection, but also of the evidence of the senses. In Criteriology or Critical Logic it is pointed out that all we can expect from these two sources (internal

and external experience) is no more and no less than the knowledge of *present facts*, internal or external respectively. We must not expect knowledge as to the intrinsic nature of these facts, of the “why and how” of these facts; if we do, then *all experimental evidence is too crude*.

Consistently All Experimental Evidence Too Crude.

I find myself touching accidentally the flame of a candle with my finger, and before I have time to reflect, I withdraw my finger. Or I see

overwhelming immediate evidence. Our doctrine of free will must indeed be a stronghold if it cannot be denied or even questioned without shaking the very foundations of all human knowledge, without jeopardizing the primitive truth of our own existence as thinking beings.

A More Fundamental Difference of Opinion.

One more word, and we are done with the discussion of Professor James' charge, that the evidence of introspection is too crude. To Professor James the question of free

Lecture 3: Free Will, the Indispensable Basis of Morality and the Necessary Complement of Man's Rational Nature

IN this lecture we shall consider the second and third proof for freedom, namely, the moral and the teleological proof. The discussion of these arguments will reveal the fact that the doctrine of free will branches into the other departments of philosophy, especially Ethics, and most intimately affects our social life. Law, obligation, right and wrong, justice and many other kindred notions acquire

a different meaning according as the doctrine of free will is accepted or rejected. The phase of the problem, then, which is before us must appeal to every serious student and every thinking mind.

The Moral Proof.

The dignity of man over all the rest of visible creation consists in his moral nature. Any supposition, therefore, which cuts the root of man's moral nature, is absurd. But the denial of freedom cuts the root of man's moral nature. Therefore the denial of freedom is absurd.

necessary connection of these notions with free will. I must enter, then, on a purely ethical question, all the more, since the ideas of Haeckel, Nietzsche and others like them, have found their way into our popular magazines, even into the literature of fiction, and have thus become a deadly poison for the reading public.

A Purely Ethical Question.

The question is briefly this: Are there any actions which are morally good or bad prior to any human or divine law, so that some actions

Another Attack on the Argument.

Before proceeding further we must at least mention another attack made on this argument. Whilst Moral Positivists deny our major proposition, there are others who deny the minor, which is otherwise generally conceded as self-evident, namely, that there is a necessary connection between free will and morality. The futility of such an attempt, however, we shall not consider now; we shall do so after we have proposed another form of the moral argument, that from obligation.

determined the evolving and enforcing of the moral law, it is nevertheless a portion of the environment which acts on the mind."

"The Will Always Follows the Greater Seeming Good."

Now when Jonathan Edwards says that the will *always* follows the *greater seeming good*, this statement, if taken in its generality ("always"), is either false or tautological; but if it be reduced to the limits of truth which it really contains (substituting "frequently" for "always"), it proves nothing against free will. Let us

be considered a valid proof against free will. At best they emphasize the limitations of free will. A more thorough treatment of the subject of Moral Statistics may be found in the *Stimmen aus Maria Laach*, 1882, I, p. 345 sq., and in the excellent work of Dr. C. Gutberlet, *Die Willensfreiheit und ihre Gegner*, 2 ed., p. 41-120.

Capping the Climax. “Free Will Makes Moral Law Impossible.”

We said above that there are some determinists — who deny what is otherwise generally conceded as

Determinism: A Perfect Mechanical Fit, a Bad Moral Fit.

We must bring our discussion of the moral aspect of free will to a close, though a great many things have remained unsaid. Professor James, as stated before, defends the doctrine of free will on ethical grounds in spite of his metaphysical speculations concerning the evidence of introspection, and in spite of his “scientific” convictions which favor determinism as “a perfect *mechanical* fit for the rest of the universe.” But he realizes

instead of the murder, *virtually defines the universe as a place in which what OUGHT to be is IMPOSSIBLE*” (l. c.).

The Teleological Proof of Free Will.

Now let us proceed to the third and last proof of free will, which we have styled the “teleological argument.” It is a specimen of a Scholastic *a-priori* proof. You need not be afraid that I will envelop you in a cloud of metaphysical dust. Ever since the Hegelian school of Philosophy brought the very name of “Metaphysics” into disrepute,

without will is what a bird would be without wings. Man's intellect, therefore, postulates will. Now this inference from intellect to will is only preparatory to my proof for free will.

Free Will the Necessary Complement of Man's Rational Nature.

The argument, then, is this: Owing to his rational nature, man is capable of objectively indifferent judgments, *i. e.*, of judgments which exhibit motives both for striving after and for rejecting any particular line of action. But these objectively indifferent

indifference of the judgment calls for active indifference or freedom of the will. Before proving it, let me illustrate its meaning.

The Watch Without Face and Hands.

Suppose you had never seen a watch. You come into a jewelry store and see there a clever artificer putting together the parts of a peculiar mechanical device, which we now call a watch. He has finished it all except that he has not yet added face and hands. Studying this peculiar machine you come to the conclusion that its various

Remember that the existence of God can be demonstrated completely without using the free will of man as a premise. If there is a God, He must be all-loving and all-wise. And if God is all-loving and all-wise, He cannot create an intellectual being, His very image and likeness, without that endowment which is necessary to complete its intellectual nature. God cannot distort His own image, He cannot create rational man without free will.

The Argument Ostracised.

Now what do the determinists say to this

value. The first emphasizes free will as *an experimental fact*, the second as the *indispensable basis of morality*, the third as the *necessary complement of man's rational nature*.

A Theological Difficulty.

Before dismissing the subject we must briefly discuss a difficulty which most naturally finds its place here, as in the third argument we were led to the consideration of the all-wise and all-loving God. It is claimed that free will is irreconcilable with God's foreknowledge of man's

mind this eternity and unchangeableness of God's vision on the one hand, and on the other the simple distinction between antecedent and consequent necessity, we shall have no difficulty in reconciling man's freedom with God's infallible foreknowledge.

Cardinal Newman on Difficulties Versus Doubts.

Of course this and other difficulties of a metaphysical nature can be urged further, and it is not modern philosophers but the Schoolmen, the staunchest defenders of free will, that

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